

Britain's missing voters

HOPE not hate invites you to join us in a huge Voter Registration drive this November



IN JUST A FEW WEEKS TIME 1.9M PEOPLE COULD DROP OFF THE ELECTORAL REGISTER as a result to changes to the way we register to vote, the biggest single act of electoral disenfranchisement in our history.

Added to the 8m people already not on the register, this new drop off will have a profound impact on our political process and radically affect the Boundary Review, which is due to start next April.

It seems incredible that 10m people, 19% of all eligible adults, will not be on the electoral register in just a few weeks time.

With most of those dropping off being from poorer and non-white communities in urban areas, as opposed to the more settled communities in the suburbs and more affluent towns, the result will be a reduction of MPs representing cities and university towns.

This is pure political gerrymandering.

The situation is set to be compounded by hundreds of thousands of new students failing to register on arriving at college this autumn and a 40% drop in 17-year-olds joining the register.

Labour Friends of HOPE not hate is launching a huge Voter Registration drive in November and we are inviting you to get involved.

We cannot just leave it to councils to register people, we need to copy the example of the US and make voter registration part of our organising process.

This newsletter tells you how to run a VR drive in your community. Whether you are a council leader, a councilor or an ordinary party member, there is a vital role for you to play.

We have no time to lose. Millions of people are about to be excluded from the political system. Please join us and let's get to work.

The voter drop-off explained

THE FORTHCOMING drop-off is due to the Government's decision to bring forward the full introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) by 12 months to 1 December 2015. Designed to reduce fraud and make the electoral register more accurate, councils compared the names on their existing voter lists with HMRC and DWP records and anyone who could not be matched was asked to re-register, but this time having also to provide their national insurance number.

New voters were also required to register individually, thus ending the system whereby one person in the household could register everyone else.

The changes first came in last summer and as a consequence there were one million fewer people on the register than the previous year. The bulk of these were students who would have previously been mass registered by their Universities.

Another five million people who council's weren't able to match with official records were allowed to stay on the register in order to vote in the General Election. In the meantime councils do their best to get them to re-register.

Many did, but it is the two million who have not yet re-registered who will now drop off in December.

Research by HOPE not hate found huge discrepancies in the drop-off rate around the country. Generally, poorer communities (esp where people live in private rented accommodation and English is not their first language) and student areas are worst affected.

Councils initially had until December 2016 to register these voters but in mid-July the Government announced its intention to bring forward the change by 12 months. It is hard not to connect this move with the Boundary Review which will determine the constituencies for the next General Election and will be based on the 1 December electoral register.

Eight of the ten worst affected local authorities were in London, with 23% set to drop off in Hackney and 18% in Brent. While inner London, where a much higher proportion of people live in private rented accommodation, is worst affected the more affluent suburbs have a much lower drop-off rate.

Glasgow is set to lose 13.3% of its electorate, while Birmingham will lose 56,000 people, a 7.7% share.

With most of those dropping off being from poorer and non-White communities in urban areas, as opposed to the more settled communities in the suburbs and more affluent towns, it is hard not to see this as a political act.

HOPE not hate is lobbying MPs and Peers to annul the Government's decision as either are entitled to do via a simple vote.

13%
lost
voters in
Cambridge

Cambridge is set to lose 13% of its voters in December and the drop-off will only be made worse by the thousands of newly arrived students who are unlikely to register.

This will dramatically alter this key marginal seat as the new parliamentary constituency will see more affluent, outlying rural areas being brought in to compensate.

WHAT MORE COUNCILS CAN DO?

Councils are already doing a lot to register people but here are a few ideas as to what more they can do:

- 1** Assess the problem, both in regards to the December drop-off but also try to calculate the number of people already not on the register.
- 2** Consider establishing a taskforce or working group that brings together the skills and contacts of several council departments. Registration should not just be left to electoral services. Involve officers and senior councillors.
- 3** Ensure adequate resources are put aside for this, both money and people. The Government has set aside £3m this autumn to help councils with registration. Make sure you apply.
- 4** The council could partner up with the local newspaper. We need to convey a sense of urgency.
- 5** Write out to key stakeholders in the community to encourage them to get involved. They will be often be more trusted with the groups least likely to be on the register.
- 6** Work collaboratively. The most effective voter registration drives are when organisations work together. So, for example, registering students is made much easier if the Council, Electoral Registration Officer, University and students union are working to a joint plan.
- 7** Make sure the council is supporting local councillors who are running VR drives in their wards.

Labour Friends of HOPE not hate is designing an art-ready Voter Registration leaflet that can be customised for a local area.

**For more details contact
mary@hopenothate.org.uk**



■ To find out the drop off in your area, visit:
<http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/voter-registration-report/>

Running a community re

A 'How to' guide for councillors

As a local councillor you are ideally placed to lead a voter registration drive in your community. You are an elected representative of your community, expected to promote the best interests of that community within your local authority.

As a councillor, you should ensure that your Council has done, or is doing four things:

- 1 Measure the problem of under-registration in your ward
- 2 Adopt a strategic plan to address that under-registration
- 3 Identify resources to make that plan a reality
- 4 Monitor and if necessary revise the plan.

Remember although the current changes and the governments decision to ignore the Electoral Commissions advice means that substantial numbers will fall off the current register, there are also large number of people who are not even on the current register. Both groups need to be registered.

LEADING YOUR COMMUNITY

Let's be honest, regrettably most people do not pay a lot of attention to letters from the local authority. If we want to get our people back on the register we are going to have to do some leg-work. As a community leader and Labour councillor you are in a perfect position to take a lead in organising your community.

Our experience teaches us to pay more attention to people we know and trust than we do to someone cold calling on our door, so try to devise a community led voter registration drive.

We have outlined a 10-step plan to running a community voter registration drive. It is designed to compliment, not duplicate, the work being done by Electoral Registration Officers.



10-point plan for running a voter registration drive

1. MAP YOUR COMMUNITY. Sit down with other councillors in your ward and some of the more embedded members of your local party and draw up a list of every community leader you know. By leader, we mean people with influence (so they may not necessarily have a formal position). For example, on almost every housing estate there will be someone who people trust, and whose opinion counts irrespective of whether they are the tenants' rep.

These might be head teachers, faith leaders, co-ordinators for various campaigns within your area, Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators or trade union activists; some of them might even be the people who fill your in-box with requests that you address specific local issues.

Specifically think about those who will have influence amongst the groups least likely to be on the register.

2. ONLINE SEARCH. Supplement this with an on-line search. Looking for faith, community and trade union contacts that you don't already know.

3. PRIORITISE AND THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX. Once you have your list, you will need to consider those who you already have a relationship with, and those who you don't. Now prioritise the people that you need to speak to. Again, prioritise those who will have influence amongst the groups least likely to be on the register.

Don't just rely on those who are already supportive of the wider Labour agenda. This issue is about people in our communities losing a fundamental democratic right: the right to vote. It is not about how people vote, so be prepared to speak to community leaders who have not in the past supported either you or the Labour party.

4. MEETING YOUR LEADERS. Once you have prioritised, arrange to meet these leaders for a discussion. Before the meetings, make sure you are well briefed so you can outline the issues and explain the potential consequences for democracy (and the extent to which disenfranchised people are unable to use the democratic process to express their grievances).

Finally make sure you have an 'ask'. It is no good simply walking away with empathy; you need a commitment to do something to change the situation.

Registration drive

The 'ASK'

Good asks might be

- To a faith leader: will you commit to hosting a voter registration drive in your place of worship? Will you put something in your faith newsletter?
- To a trade unionist: will you circulate details of how to vote to all your members? Will you invite a speaker to your branch meeting?
- To a community or campaign group: would you host a community meeting on this issue? At these pubic events we need to get our community registered to vote otherwise our voices will not be heard.

5. BUILDING AN EVENT. When you get commitments to organise voter registration events, make sure you also have permission to publicise these wider than the host group. Perhaps you can arrange to leaflet surrounding streets/ estates inviting people to come down and register. Putting on refreshments in the early evening is a sure fire way to get a better turnout.

NI numbers

Remember to remind people that they need their National Insurance number when promoting an event. Remind faith leaders, trade unions and community groups of this too. The last thing you want is for people to attend a Voter Registration event and not have their NI number to hand.

6. SPREAD THE MESSAGE. Social media is also a great way to spread the word, particularly if you can link voter registration with a local issue of concern: a controversial planning application, anti-social behaviour, licensing and the night-time economy etc. Having the right to vote is important, it is the way in which we have our voices heard.

Ask the council to publicise your events on the council website.

Urgency and anger

Install a sense of urgency into the ask. Whether it is seeking volunteers to help or engaging with community and faith groups, you have to impress upon them the need to act now! Impress upon them the 1 December deadline.

Anger is a great motivator so remind people that this is political gerrymandering. This is the Tories trying to redraw the parliamentary boundaries to their advantage.

7. VIDEO TESTIMONY. You might want to get local video testimony (which can be recorded on a smartphone) from people who discovered they were due to come off the register; tweeting/facebooking these stories can be a powerful way to get the message across: democracy is in danger: we have to act now

8. GET SOME HELP. Ask your local party branch and all those new members and supporters who joined up as a result of the leadership election. What better way to get them involved in the party, than by doing something practical.

9. GET ELECTORAL SERVICES INVOLVED. We know that Labour Party members are not allowed to take away Voter Registration forms so why not ask electoral services to send someone along to the meeting or event.

As council officials they are allowed to take the forms away and their presence gives credibility to your event.

10. PROMOTE YOUR SUCCESSES. If you've registered 30 people at a local church then make sure everyone else knows, especially the community leaders you are trying to run their own drives. Use it as a springboard for more registration drives.

Finally, always stress that this is a democratic crisis that can be solved, if the government simply followed the advice of the Electoral Commission and agreed to honour original timescale for the transitional arrangements.

Whatever you do: contact Mary, mary@hopenothate.org.uk, to let us know what is happening (so we can report on the growth of this campaign) and for more advice.



Remember to use the link
<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>
in all on and off line messaging.



Registering students



ONE OF THE CONSEQUENCES of the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration has been the massive drop-off in numbers of students registered to vote. In the past Universities were able to mass register students but now they have to register themselves, which of course most of them did not do.

Last September there were over 500,000 fewer students on the register compared to the previous year and while councils and universities did a brilliant job in registering students ahead of the General Election we are likely to see a similar drop off this autumn.

Registering students can be difficult. Joining the electoral register is not the top priority for students arriving at University for the first time and few know their National Insurance number.

However, help is at hand. Unbeknown to most Universities, Councils and even most Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), the Government gave EROs the discretion to use student numbers in place of national insurance numbers. Given most students carry their University student cards with them every day suddenly registration can become a whole lot easier.

The Cabinet Office memo, dated 10 December, is available from HOPE not hate and according to the Electoral Commission remains valid today.

During the General Election we were able to register thousands of students this way. The key, though, is getting all the interested parties working together.

Here we outline a simple step-by-step guide to running a Student VR campaign.

STEP ONE

Get your local ERO to agree to use student numbers. We can provide you with the Cabinet Office guidance and a list of areas which adopted this change in the General Election.

STEP TWO

Once the ERO is on board, engage the University and ensure they will allow and promote a VR drive on their property. We are working with Universities UK to encourage University support.

STEP THREE

Get the Students' Union to agree to host a VR week. This should be built and promoted properly. Student newspapers, display boards, social media and even lecture shout-outs must all be utilised.

STEP FOUR

Get the Council to support all this and provide electoral services staff for the VR event. They will be able to answer any questions, add credibility to the drive and – crucially – be allowed to take the completed forms away with them.

If for any reason your ERO will not accept student numbers then contact us and we will supply you with an alternative campaign plan.



**For help, support and advice on running
a VR campaign on campus, please contact
Joelle at joelle@hopenothate.org.uk**



Vote HOPE – the campaign against the politics of fear

ELECTION NIGHT on May 7th 2015 was heartbreaking for so many of us, as we watched colleagues who had dedicated their lives to the Labour Party get pipped at the post in seats the length and breadth of the country. There were some bright spots though, and for me, one of the most important, was Nigel Farage's failure to become the UKIP MP for South Thanet. This was in no small part because of the work that was done by the HOPE not hate team in the months running up to polling day – a campaign that was replicated in Grimsby, Cardiff, Dudley, Southampton and Thurrock. We know that HOPE not hate delivers in local communities, empowering people to stand up to the politics of hate and fear.

So as Labour activists the question for us must be – How can the Labour Party run similar campaigns in our heartlands, and key seats, to enthuse people to get involved and stand up against the vile politics promoted by UKIP and their ilk?

We know that the Labour Party is at its best when we are offering a vision of HOPE for the future. A positive alternative to UKIP's ideological assault on the values and institutions we hold dear. An offer and a campaign based on hope and ambition not fear and hate. But this cannot be a top down national campaign, it has to be a grassroots response to local

issues. Labour values, in Labour communities, fighting for a Labour victory.

That's why we're launching Labour Friends of HOPE not hate to support constituency Labour Parties as they develop campaigns in the coming months and years. Our goal is to support you and your local activists take the fight to UKIP and beat them – on every street and at every election.

So I'm asking you to sign your CLP up, to come to our training events and to fight the good fight once again as we make the case for the type of country that we want to live in.

Ruth Smeeth MP

Chair of Labour Friends of HOPE not hate



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☐ CLPs £30 ☐ MPs £20 ☐ Individual party members £5

Name

CLP

Address

Telephone

Email

Please return to: Labour Friends of HOPE not hate, PO Box 1084, Wembley HA9 1HT

LABOUR FRIENDS OF HOPE NOT HATE IS HOLDING FOUR DAYSCHOOLS TO HELP LOCAL LABOUR PARTIES FIGHT UKIP.

- London 23 January
- Birmingham 23 January
- Cardiff 5 February
- Sheffield 5 February

For more details, contact Mary at mary@hopenothate.org.uk

